

This Day in History... December 5, 1775

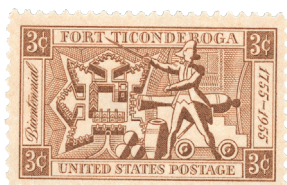
The Knox Expedition

On December 5, 1775, Continental Army Colonel Henry Knox reached Fort Ticonderoga in preparation for his “noble train of artillery.”

Following the battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, Benedict Arnold recommended that the Americans capture Fort Ticonderoga from the British. At the time, Boston was under siege, and Ticonderoga had a substantial store of heavy weapons.

Around the same time, Ethan Allen had the same idea to capture Ticonderoga, so the two men worked together and took over the fort on May 10 without firing a shot. Arnold had planned to transport the equipment to Boston himself, but quarrels over the command of the fort led him to resign his post in June.

By July, George Washington was in charge of the troops outside of Boston and desperately needed heavy weapons. He then chose 25-year-old Henry Knox to travel to Ticonderoga to collect them and bring them to Boston. Washington stated that “no trouble or expense must be spared to obtain them.”



Stamp issued for the 200th anniversary of Fort Ticonderoga.

Washington officially gave Knox the order to get the weapons on November 16 and allocated £1,000 to cover the expenses. The Second Continental Congress also awarded Knox a colonel’s commission for his undertaking the assignment.

Knox left Washington’s camp on November 17, went to New York City for supplies, and reached Ticonderoga on December 5. Immediately after arriving, Knox wasted no time and set to work identifying the weapons to transport and organized how they would be moved. He selected 59 pieces of varying sizes, with a total weight of about 119,000 pounds.

The journey to Boston began the next day, with the equipment carried overland to the northern end of Lake George. From there it was loaded onto a gundalow and sailed down the length of the lake. Along the journey, the barge foundered and nearly sunk, but was able to be recovered. On December 17, Knox sent a letter to Washington informing him that he’d built “forty two exceeding strong sleds, and have provided eighty yoke of oxen to drag them as far as Springfield.” He hoped “in 16 or 17 days to be able to present your Excellency a Noble train of Artillery.”

Knox then traveled ahead of the train to Albany to meet with Philip Schuyler to plan on how to get the cannons across the Hudson. Though several crashed through the ice during that portion of the journey, they were all recovered with assistance from the residents of Albany. As the train continued toward Boston, citizens heard about it and came out to watch it pass by. In Westfield, Massachusetts, Knox fired one of the large guns for an excited crowd.

The artillery train finally reached Boston on January 25. In all the journey took about 10 weeks, much longer than the two weeks Knox had hoped for. Washington was grateful to finally have the guns and immediately began putting them into place. He first fired the guns against the British on March 2. By March 17, the British decided to retreat. Knox later became the chief artillery officer of the Continental Army.

To commemorate the 150th anniversary of the journey, New York and Massachusetts placed commemorative plaques at 56 spots along the route Knox took in 1775.



Stamp issued on Knox's 235th birthday.



Taken from a painting known as the Virginia Colonel by Charles Willson Peale.

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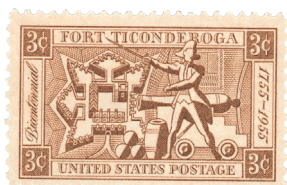
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